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EUROCIETT STAKEHOLDER CONFERENCE EU2020 FROM STRATEGY INTO ACTION

ADDRESS BY STEVEN D'HAESELEER DIRECTOR FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS

BUSINESSEUROPE broadly supports the EU2020 strategic priority of fostering Inclusive Growth and the 75% employment rate target.

Inclusive growth means first and foremost making full use of Europe's labour force potential. Across Europe, employers have done whatever they could to limit job losses as a result of the crisis. While large divergences exist across the European Union, unemployment seems now to be stabilising. However, bringing down unemployment will be a daunting challenge.

What are the measures to be put in place to achieve inclusive labour markets? First and foremost, it will require economic growth. A European economy growing at 2% - instead of 1% - amounts to 6.5 million additional jobs and a public debt consolidation of 450 billion euros by 2015 – or 7% of GDP. Major stumbling blocks on the path to a sustained economic recovery must be addressed. The biggest challenge, is to combine fiscal discipline and growth.

Secondly, we need flexicurity reforms to enrich the employment content of growth. I am well aware that this is a sensitive concept. But without discussing and implementing it, we will not be able to facilitate job creation and integrate more people in the labour market. We all agree that activating our labour markets should be a priority.

Youth unemployment now stands at more than 20%. This is unacceptable. We cannot allow this waste of resources to continue. Tackling labour market rigidities is the only way to reduce youth as well as structural unemployment.

The European social partners have discussed the conditions for growth and employment creation in the joint statement on the EU2020 strategy. The negotiations have not been easy. But we have been able to say a lot together. It proves that the European social dialogue is working well and able to deliver results also in difficult times. Building on our 2007 joint labour market analysis, we have re-iterated our common support to flexicurity. In times of crisis, ambitious flexicurity to facilitate transitions from one job to the next are more important than ever.



We have also negotiated an agreement on Inclusive Labour Markets, which was presented at the Tripartite Social Summit on 25 March 2010. The objective of employers was to achieve an agreement that helps to increase employment participation as a response to demographic ageing and globalisation. The focus is put on disadvantaged people.

The agreement recognizes that achieving inclusive labour markets is a key concern involving the shared responsibilities of employers, individuals and workers. Building on this, the framework agreement identifies examples of concrete measures that can be taken such as:

- Awareness-raising campaigns to improve and/or restore the image of a sector or occupation(s); and/or to promote the diversity of the workforce;
- Cooperation with education and training systems in order to better match the needs of the individual and those of the labour market;
- Promotion of apprenticeships and traineeships

Achieving inclusive labour markets is not the sole responsibility of social partners. The agreement therefore stresses the motivation and responsibilities of individuals for developing their employability. It also addresses recommendations to public authorities and other actors. They should be taken into account when Member States develop their national flexicurity strategies.

One of these recommendations concerns the need to increase the availability and quality of career advice services to help and support jobseekers to find a job and provide workers with the necessary skills.

Here, private employment agencies have a key role to play. This is even more so in view of the pressure on public employment services to help higher numbers of jobseekers in an environment of financial constraints. But also more generally, private employment agencies can contribute to achieving more inclusive labour markets: by allowing vulnerable workers to enter the labour market, by helping the long-term unemployed to gain confidence; acquire skills and demonstrate capacities to potential employers; by facilitating transitions in the labour market.

To conclude, achieving inclusive labour markets is a concern of European employers. We cannot afford the waste the potential of currently underrepresented groups on the labour market. We need flexible labour market policies and determined action from all actors to achieve this. The importance of the agency work sector in this respect cannot be underestimated.
